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PROGRAM This Week with David Brinkley STATION WJLA-TV
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SUBJECT Interview with President Marcos and Senator Laxalt

DAVID BRINKLEY: Senator Laxalt, thanks very much for coming in today....

Here with us are George Will of ABC News, and Sam Donaldson, ABC News White House correspondent.

Now, Senator, you went to Manila, on the President's request. And what did you say when you got there? What did you say to President Marcos?

SENATOR PAUL LAXALT: Well, David, the first thing that I did was to hand to him a handwritten letter by the President, three or four pages long. And that was my primary mission. And that letter essentially expressed President Reagan's concern for his old friend -- and they've been old friends for a long while -- about what was going on in the Philippines.

He read it very carefully, and it was my impression that he was touched by it. Because after finishing reading it, he looked up at me and said, "Senator, I don't mean at all to add to the burdens of this great President."

Then we proceeded to get into a freewheeling discussion about all the various areas of concern that were expressed by the President in his letter.

BRINKLEY: Well, in these various areas of concern, did he respond?

SENATOR LAXALT: Yes, he did. He effectively attempted to rebut the cases being made against Marcos in this country. He indicated, economically, yes, they'd had a hard time. They'd

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suffered the same recession problems that most nations had, particularly developing nations like the Philippines. But they're on the road back.

Politically, he felt he was in good shape, prepared to go into the elections next year and in '87. Insurgency had a sense of a problem, but that it was manageable.

He's a very brilliant man and a well-informed man. And he, effectively, thinks that the case against him has been overstated.

SAM DONALDSON: What do you think, Senator? Has the case been overstated?

SENATOR LAXALT: I'm not sure whether it has been or not. I know this, that he has a problem with this country, he has a problem with this country's media, he has a problem with the Congress. And the perception, which in this case can be just as injurious to him as the fact, is that that country is in serious difficulty.

My impression is, in talking with him, is that -- and the open question is whether or not he's insulated to the point where he's not getting reliable information -- my assessment of him personally is that he's physically in good shape. Now, maybe that was a temporary thing in the couple of meetings I had with him. But he seems to have a knowledge of the problems of his country, and he's attempting to meet them.

GEORGE WILL: One of the Manila newspapers greeted your arrival with a headline that says, "Another meddler arrives from the United States."

Now, there is a sense in which you were there, I suppose, to tell him that pressure might be put on him. Let's deal specifically with the question of General Ver, who some people feel, although he may be acquitted, had something to do with the Aquino assassination.

If he's acquitted and then restored to power, what's Congress's reaction going to be?

SENATOR LAXALT: I'll tell you, George, just exactly what I told President Marcos: that the reinstatement of General Ver for any extended period of time could well cause a firestorm here in the Congress. It's that sort of simple thing that will cause Congress to react and react violently.

Historically, as far as Marcos is concerned, we could not forget that he did constitute an impartial commission on the

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heels of the Aquino slaying. And that commission went ahead and caused indictments to be issued against many of the Marcos people, including Ver.

He told me, in talking with -- he told me in connection with General Ver that he had an honor commitment to take him back in the event he were acquitted, and he intends to fulfill that commitment.

I would hope that he would heed the concern that I expressed to him on this particular matter and attempt to work it out.

WILL: Well, this gets to the heart of the matter. The parallel that seems ominous to a number of people in Washington is that with the Shah, who, in his final period, seemed to have a denial reflex. You couldn't get reality through to him.

Do you detect that on the part of President Marcos?

SENATOR LAXALT: I'm not really sure because I wasn't privy to those final consultations with the Shah. That similarity has been drawn by people who were familiar with both situations. But I'm not sure, in my own mind, based upon the observations, that I see there's a comparable between the Iranian situation and the Philippine situation. There's no indication of a fundamentalist religious movement moving in there. And the Philippine people, by and large, tend to be far more loyal to the United States, as a group, than the Iranians did.

WILL: But who are the insurgents in this case? The Philippine people are one thing. Are the insurgents, what, communists, agrarian reformers? How would you characterize them?

SENATOR LAXALT: Oh, a mix. A mix. I think it's clear, at least in briefings that were given me, that while the people generally may be just ordinary agrarian types, rural types who are seeking reforms because they think the policies have been either unresponsive or oppressive, they probably aren't tainted with any particular ideology. But it's pretty clear from the intelligence assessments that were given to me that leadership certainly is communist-inspired and -oriented.

DONALDSON: Senator, what was the bottom line of the message you carried from President Marcos's old friend, as you describe him, the President of the United States? Was it that we'd like him to change, we'd like him to make these reforms, or that we insist on it?

SENATOR LAXALT: The bottom line, first of all, Sam, was this: that the President had concerns. He hadn't come to grips

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that. We'd had a number of emissaries, in and out of government, talking with him say, "You know, President Marcos, there's deep concern throughout the United States, including Washington, about where this country is going." And he, apparently in all those discussions, pretty much waved them off, feeling that this was not a legitimate presidential concern.

My primary mission, Sam, was to indicate to him that this concern was shared by the President of the United States, himself.

DONALDSON: But a concern is one thing, Senator, and insistence on change for continued U.S. support is another. Which is it?

SENATOR LAXALT: Well, it's a delicate line. You know, they are a sovereign country. We can advise and advise strongly about the concerns of general problems and indicate strongly that reforms would be in our mutual interest. Where you get over the line in transgressing the sovereignty of an independent country like the Philippines is where it really gets sticky.

DONALDSON: Well, do you share the concern that our own estimate, as said on the Hill the other day, is that President Marcos within three years could be facing a full-scale civil war that could topple him?

SENATOR LAXALT: I have no way to assess that, one way or the other. I don't pose, nor have I when I went, as a Philippine expert, Sam. I read the various intelligence reports. There's no way that I could tell you with any degree of authority that he has three or five or ten years left, in view of the insurgency problem. All I can tell you, it appears to be growing at an alarming rate. And unless he takes some strong steps to correct this, it could eventually topple him.

DONALDSON: Well now, he may tell us that yesterday he instituted some tax reforms to try to make more efficient the collection of taxes, to try to satisfy the International Monetary Fund, which has withheld over $400 million, at the moment, of loans to the Philippines.

Do you think that's enough?

SENATOR LAXALT: Well, it's not. Certainly not in itself is it sufficient.

But I might say, on the heels of my visit, he has attempted to cooperate. Whether it's in response to my mission, I can't really tell. But he did appreciably raise the defense budget. He did change command authority so that the field

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can now be made in the field rather than in Manila, which was a primary source of complaint as far as the military people were concerned. And he's also indicated a strong interest in doing something effectively about the overextended generals which he has. He's got a number of old-timers around that palace who have stayed well beyond their period, and there's deep resentment among the general officers.

DONALDSON: And he just extended many of them for another six months.

SENATOR LAXALT: I don't know whether he did or not. You're telling me that, Sam.

DONALDSON: Well, there's a -- yes.

SENATOR LAXALT: I was unfamiliar that he's done this just now.

DONALDSON: Yes.

BRINKLEY: Senator, if -- I don't expect this, and I don't think you do. But let's suppose President Marcos said, "Gee, you folks are right. Things are pretty tough. I can't deal with it. I'm going to retire at the end of this term." Do we have anyone in mind who might be a good -- who might be a successor, a successful successor?

SENATOR LAXALT: I don't know of anybody that we have. Apparently, there are several alternative candidates who are being floated. Their system isn't unlike ours. The balloons are up.

You've got Senator Laurel. Corason (?) Aquino, the widow of Mr. Aquino is a very popular person.

BRINKLEY: She says she doesn't want to run.

SENATOR LAXALT: The names are being floated. The speculation is to the effect that if these all can be moved and they form an effective coalition, that Marcos could be toppled in an election. Whether or not that's the case, I don't know.

I do know that there was an independent poll conducted a few months ago, a combination church/businessmen, which indicated that Marcos has surprisingly great political strength among Filipino people, generally.

WILL: Short question, short answer. What do you make of the fact that shortly after this flurry of interest, Mrs. Marcos went to Moscow? What were they trying to tell us with that trip?

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SENATOR LAXALT: I don't think there's anything particular -- I asked that particular question. Apparently, she's made trips of this kind before. I don't think it's the kind of cozying up that Ortega intended to signal us when he went on his little jaunt. And I don't see any connection between that trip and what we're trying to do.

BRINKLEY: Senator, thank you....

Coming next, by satellite from the Philippines, President Ferdinand Marcos.

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BRINKLEY: President Marcos, in Manila, thank you very much for being with us today. A pleasure to have you here.

PRESIDENT FERDINAND MARCOS: Thank you for this opportunity to appear on your show.

BRINKLEY: A pleasure to have you.

Now, we have a topic here that is slightly difficult to deal with. The U.S. Government is urging, not to say pushing, you to make reforms, and listing various problems in the Philippines. And your response is that they're all exaggerated, the problems are not serious, they can all be solved.

Why do the Americans see all sorts of dangers that you don't see?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: I never said that the problems that we have are not serious. They are. We have an economic crisis. We are trying to work out the recovery program with IMF and the World Bank. We have an insurgency which is umbilically connected to the economic crisis.

I feel, we feel, my advisers in the government feel that to go into the insurgency program without first solving the economic crisis is not going to work. We must finish our plans with the IMF.

And it is not true that the IMF has refused to accept the program of the Philippines. On the contrary, there is a team right here which is working out the program, first the reforms with respect to certain industries, like sugar, coconut. And I believe that we have come to an agreement on all of these. And then the internal revenue code, the restructuring of five billion pesos in loans, ODA, or the Paris Club, and private borrowers guaranteed by the government, the new money that is coming, about $400 million, and the trade credits extended by about 483

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banks, or most of them, anyway, amounting to about $3 billion, which are now available to us.

WILL: President Marcos...

PRESIDENT MARCOS: We are working on the third tranche in order that we may be able to get the additional funds by December.

WILL: President Marcos...

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Now, if we work this out, then the reduction in the funds available for the insurgency, or anti-insurgency program will help in our efforts at eliminating the danger of communist insurgency.

BRINKLEY: President...

PRESIDENT MARCOS: We, however, need the aid which we consider as part of the obligation of the United States, under the American facilities agreement worked out in '79, amended in '83, and now in the implementation in the American Congress.

BRINKLEY: President Marcos, you can't see us, I believe. George -- you're not missing a great deal. But George...

PRESIDENT MARCOS: I can see you.

BRINKLEY: Oh, you can. I didn't think you could.

Anyway, George Will has a question for you.

WILL: Well, President Marcos, to take off from what you just said, the Congress of the United States is important to the economic future of the Philippines, which is in turn important to your counterinsurgency. You've just heard Senator Laxalt say that if General Ver, even if acquitted, is returned to a leading role in the military, there would be a firestorm of reaction against the Philippines in Congress.

Are you bearing this in mind? And what is your inclination to do with General Ver? I'm not sure you can hear me, having dropped your earpiece.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: I'm afraid my earplug fell off. Can you say that again?

WILL: My question was this: that you just heard Senator Laxalt say that if General Ver is restored to a position of leadership in the military, there'll be a firestorm of protest

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in Congress, with incalcuable consequencs to aid to the Philippines. How will this affect your decision regarding the future of General Ver?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: I have given my word of honor that if he is acquitted, he will be reinstated. But I never promised how long he was going to stay. And perhaps in the process of the reinstatement, we can get together with all the officers of the armed forces and determine exactly how a whole reorganization of the armed forces can be worked out with both General Ver and the acting Chief of Staff now, General Ramos, and the major service commanders, the regional commanders, and all the others who have something to say about the military organization.

I believe that if what you say is correct, then perhaps we can work out with the military some kind of, as I said, an overall reorganization of the military. It's due anyway.

WILL: President Marcos, there's a perception here that your problems derive from the fact that your mandate is gone, whatever it once was. Now, there is a way of renewing a mandate, and that is to have elections. And there are some people here who wonder if it is not possible and if you would not be willing to move up the election date, the better to renew your mandate soon, say within the next eight months or so.

Is that possible, that you could have an election earlier than scheduled?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, I understand the opposition has been asking for an election. In answer to their request, I announced that I am ready to call a snap election, perhaps earlier than eight months, perhaps in three months, or less than that. If all these [unintelligible], these claims to popularity on both sides have to be settled. I think we'd better settle it by calling an election right now, or, say, give everybody 60 days to campaign and to bring the issues to the people.

DONALDSON: Are there any catches, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: I'm ready. I'm ready. I'm ready.

DONALDSON: Mr. President, are there any catches? Can everyone run in this election? If Corason Aquino wants to run, if Senator Laurel wants to run, everyone can run.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Anybody. Anybody.

DONALDSON: And so 60 days from now, you're saying, we're going to have an election in the Philippines. Is that correct?

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PRESIDENT MARCOS: We might. I mean I am decided that, with these suggestions coming from the opposition, and now in this show and interview, I'm ready. I'm ready to call a snap election. But we have to submit this to some of our leaders in the Batasa (?), the legislature.

BRINKLEY: Let me interrupt. Mr. President, let me interrupt for a moment.

* * *

BRINKLEY: Now, I would -- what we hear here in Washington is that the Soviet Union has increased the size of its embassy in Manila substantially and is making contact or trying to make contact with your insurgents, who are communist or led by communists. Can you tell us anything about that?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: I don't believe there has been an increase in the personnel of the Russian Embassy since they established their embassy here several years ago. We cannot confirm any attempt for the Russians trying to contact our insurgents. But that is a possibility. Any number of people seem to want to get in touch with the rebels. We also try and get in touch with some of them. They try to infiltrate us, we try to infiltrate them. This is well known.

DONALDSON: Mr. President I have a question on the elections that you may call, and then I have another area. My question is...

PRESIDENT MARCOS: By all means.

DONALDSON: My question is, since the allegation against you is that you have conducted massive voting fraud in the past, if you hold elections in 60 days or so, will you allow outside observers into the Philippines to oversee the elections to make certain they're fair?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: You're all invited to come. And we will invite members of the American Congress to please come and see what is happening here.

All this talk about fraud, it's sour grapes, all these poor losers. Since 1965, 1969, when I first ran for the presidency, and again in 1981, there has been no formal complaint about fraud. But of course, it's a publicity stunt. The opposition keeps kicking about alleged fraud.

Now, many people who are disfranchised because of the operations of the NPA, which is playing footsy with the opposition? In one district alone of about a million voters, 60,000 were disfranchised because of the NPA.

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DONALDSON: All right. I'm certain that the international team that you said could come in and watch the elections will also look at the question that you just raised about disenfranchisement by the NPA.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Oh, yes.

DONALDSON: Let me move to another area. Fifteen Americans have been killed in the Philippines in the past two years. And five days ago the U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, Mr. Bosworth, gave a talk there in which he said, "Frankly, my countrymen find it hard to understand how these killings could occur and pass unpunished in an allied country."

Why have you not punished the killers of those Americans?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: I beg your pardon. All these cases have been investigated. The matter was taken up between the consul general, Mr. Makonintz (?), and the deputy chief of staff of the constabulary, General Multo (?). We have all filed indicating that all cases have been investigated...

DONALDSON: Well, has anyone been convicted, sir? Has anyone been convicted of the murders?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Yes. Oh, yes.

DONALDSON: Of these 15 Americans?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Oh, yes. Yes, of course. And some of them were given light sentences, and the American Ambassador doesn't see why, let's say, on a charge of homicide it could be only six years.

Well, that's the way the judiciary works. They're free.

In your case, was it Mr. Hinckley who was acquitted on a temporary insanity plea, or who was allowed to go free? Well, that's the way the judiciary works. We cannot control it. If I did, I would be called again worse than a dictator.

DONALDSON: Well, of course, as you know, the allegation is that you control the judiciary. You mentioned General Ver a moment ago and you said you had given your pledge of honor to reinstate him if he was acquitted. But as you know, sir, the evidence against him, from his own lips, was denied in the court. And it is said that because of your influence, the main evidence that might have convicted him was not allowed.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: That sounds like my opposition.

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That's the line that they have adopted. But they participated in the trial. It was a seven-month trial. They went to the Supreme Court twice and they presented about 60 witnesses. And the witnesses were unmasked, they were shown to be a big fraud. In some instances, the witnesses themselves admitted that they were patients of insane asylums. And in a report of an agent that had worked with them, they had admitted that they didn't know anything about the case. And yet they were presented as witnesses.

Now, take a look at all of this. By and large, our judiciary is one of the best in the world. And I stand for it. We reorganized it several months -- several years ago in the reorganization of the government, where I removed about 5000 officers and employees, and many judges were removed.

BRINKLEY: Mr. President, you say -- you told us a minute ago that you might call a snap election, call it quickly, call it earlier than scheduled. Why would you do that? Is this in response to pressure from the outside? Why would you do that?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: No, no, no, no, no. Now that you bring up this matter, this silly claim on both sides that one is more popular than the other and that the people are supporting them, you raise the question of the inept -- alleged ineptness -- an opposition term, incidentally -- and which may now question the effectivity of the armed forces and disturb, perhaps, the other institutions of our government, like the judiciary, and the policies that I have adopted in relation to economic recovery. And I think this should be brought to our people. You know, let's see what the people say about this question of support, this question of policies.

WILL: President Marcos, just so our viewers will understand exactly what you're saying, I gather your term, if you were to serve the full term, would extend until, what, 1987? Is that correct.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Eighty-seven.

WILL: That's right.

Now, how do you do this? Don't you have to change, have some kind of legislative provision? Or are you going to...

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Yes.

WILL: Or are you going to resign and then run?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: It probably would be sufficient for the legislature, upon my suggestion, recommendation, for instance, to include in the pending election probe a statement to

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the effect that in addition to the other causes for calling a special election for President, which are the permanent disability of the President, his death, his removal from office, and resignation, the four instances, you can add another instance where when, in his judgment, there is need to bring a fundamental issue to the people and a vote taken in order that the decision may be arrived at, which would be similar if in a parliamentary system yuou abolished the parliament on a fundamental issue.

WILL: Mr. President, are you then saying -- we're running out of time -- that we can expect an election in the Philippines, say, in January or February of 1986?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Yes, if I can convince the Batasa, and I think I can. We control two-thirds of the membership.

BRINKLEY: Mr. President, we will watch with interest to see what happens. Thank you very much for being with us today. It's been a pleasure to have you.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, thank you.

BRINKLEY: Thank you.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Thank you very much.

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